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ABSTRACT

To meet increasing demand, the State University System (SUS) of Florida has initiated joint program evaluations with the major professional accrediting bodies. As accreditation and program reviews typically demand similar information and similar procedures the two activities can be synchronized. The purpose of assessing and enhancing quality, a cornerstone of both types of review, forms the basis for joint reviews. SUS has developed and used a variety of models to suit the parameters of each review: first, coordinating only the self-study component; second, Board staff reviewing the self-study document prepared for accreditation, accompanying the accreditation examining team on the site visit, and reviewing the accreditation report; third, coordinated site visits with different reports; and, fourth, coordination of both site visit and self-study. Particularly difficult is synchronizing reviews involving programs at several universities. SUS lessons learned from coordination efforts include: (1) reviews should be carefully timed to allow for preparation and complex scheduling; (2) joint reviews should be conducted only with strong accrediting bodies; (3) many options should be considered; (4) different models should be used for different circumstances; (5) the increased manpower of joint reviews can result in greater site visit efficiency; (6) the SUS consultant/s should not vote on accreditation standards if involved in the entire site visit. (Contains three references.) (JB)

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Joint Accreditation and State Program Reviews: Breaking New Ground

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Abstract

Universities routinely undergo evaluations by professional accreditation bodies and by governing boards. The increasing demands for accountability in education generate inordinate pressures for providing large amounts of information and repeated scrutiny from multiple stakeholders. To reduce this burden, the State University System of Florida, which conducts cyclical program reviews of all academic programs within its nine institutions, has taken a proactive stance in initiating joint program evaluations with the major professional accrediting bodies for teacher education, business, education, medicine, and pharmacy. This paper discusses the lessons learned from joint endeavors and offers suggestions for successful cooperative efforts.

Joint Accreditation and State Program Reviews: Breaking New Ground

Introduction

Institutions of higher education routinely undergo multiple evaluations each year. These include activities by regional and disciplinary accreditation bodies, governing boards, and internal self-study committees. The increasing demands for accountability in higher education generate inordinate pressures for providing increasing amounts of information and repeated scrutiny from multiple stakeholders. These demands come at a time when the faculty of universities are also being asked or directed to spend more time in classrooms.

In an attempt to reduce the burden of multiple evaluations on universities, some evaluation experts have advocated cooperative models whereby various entities responsible for evaluation synchronize their work (Lincoln, 1990; Barak and Breier, 1990.) However, the implementation of such cooperative models has been limited.

The State University System of Florida (SUS) has taken a proactive stance in examining, initiating, and implementing joint program evaluations involving several of the major professional accrediting bodies. The paper discusses the lessons learned from the joint endeavors and offers suggestions to institutions of higher education and agencies engaged in evaluation for successful cooperative evaluation efforts.

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Accreditation and Program Review: Comparisons and Contrasts

The concept of synchronizing statewide or institutional program review and accreditation is based on the premise that there are enough similarities between these two types of activities to make synchronization viable. Barak and Breier (1990) note the following similarities between program review and accreditation:

a) Both typically require a self-study, an on-site visit, an evaluation report, and recommendations.

b) Both typically use data to assess the program being evaluated (p. 118)

The similarities in procedure and in the types of data assessed facilitate the synchronization of the two types of evaluations. The goals of the two activities must also be examined, and here there are both similarities and differences.

Accreditation usually involves formative reviews intended to improve the program, measuring it against predetermined standards (Barak and Breier, 1990). Failure to meet the minimum standards could result in the failure to gain initial accreditation or to maintain accreditation status.

Program Review may be either formative or summative evaluation, which may involve not only program improvement but also program termination. It goes beyond concern with meeting minimum criteria and may involve an interest in increasing efficiency. The link between program review and cost effectiveness, and the additional dimensions of program

termination and moving beyond minimum predetermined standards are important differences between program review and accreditation.

A recent dissertation study conducted by Moon-Hee Lee (1991) provides information regarding the purposes of program review in the 39 states which conduct such reviews on a statewide basis, and the purposes of the regional accrediting agencies. The purposes of regional accreditation differ somewhat from the purposes of program accreditation, but there are at least two purposes held in common: 1) Quality--assessing and enhancing educational quality, and 2) Assurance--assuring constituencies that the institution or the program meets minimum quality standards.

A comparison of the purposes of accreditation and program review provides useful insight to those interested in synchronizing the two types of evaluative activities. The most frequently identified purposes of program review were:

- Assessing and enhancing program quality (62%)
- Increasing responsiveness to changing program need (49%)
- Increasing efficiency and effectiveness of resources (36%)
- Consumer protection--providing optimum service and access (23%)
- Facilitating statewide planning and budgeting (23%)
- Eliminating costly duplication of programs (23%) (Lee, 1991).

The purpose of assessing and enhancing **quality**, a cornerstone of both accreditation and the majority of program reviews, forms the basis for joint reviews. Two other program review purposes mentioned above also relate to accreditation.

Increasing responsiveness of a program to changing program need may be part of accreditation in the sense of examining programmatic responses to changes in the discipline. The purpose of **consumer protection** in program review usually involves protection through optimum service and access to constituents, as well as protection through acceptable quality of offerings. While the issues of service and access may not apply to accreditation, the issue of consumer protection through certification of meeting minimum standards is certainly central.

When one moves from the purposes of program review and accreditation down to the more specific level of considering the **criteria** involved in the reviews, clear areas of similarities and divergences between program review and accreditation begin to emerge. The most frequently utilized criteria in state-level program reviews, as noted by Lee (1991), and the authors' assessment of whether they are generally considered in accreditation reviews is indicated in the following table:

Program Review Criteria	**Applicable to Accreditation**
Program quality	Yes
Cost effectiveness of academic program	No, but provision of adequate resources is an issue
Student demand	No
Program productivity	Inferred, but not central consideration

Table Continued

Program Review Criteria	Applicable to Accreditation
Centrality of program to institutional mission	Yes
Program duplication	No
Statewide manpower need	No
Interconnectedness of a program with other programs	Contribution of other programs to program reviewed
Geographical access to program	No
Student outcomes	Yes

Although on its face the table seems to indicate several areas of divergence in criteria between program review and accreditation, most data elements and other information used to evaluate the criteria and, therefore, included in self-studies in program review, are generally included in accreditation self-studies as well. Some of the criteria identified above as being unique to program review, such as state manpower needs and geographical access to program, are typically obtained from sources other than the self-studies.

Types of Joint Reviews

Joint reviews may take several forms, and the SUS has developed and utilized a variety of models to suit the specific

parameters of each review.

One of the easiest types of coordination to accomplish is coordination involving self-studies alone. In such cases the SUS examines the self-study format or actual self-study prepared for accreditation in the discipline to be reviewed, determines what additional information is needed for purposes of the state review, and requests that information as an addendum to the accreditation self-study. This approach is currently being used in an SUS review of Communication programs, using self-studies prepared for the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) accreditation.

Such coordination can occur when the timing of the state review is reasonably close to that of the accreditation review. It has the advantage of being a simple means of drastically reducing the effort required by the universities to develop two self-study documents. This coordination, however, does not eliminate the need for separate on-site visits.

Another relatively simple model of joint review involves staff from the Board reviewing the self-study document prepared for accreditation, accompanying the examining team for accreditation on the site visit, and reviewing the accreditation report. This model involves obtaining agreement by the accrediting agency and/or the university to join in the site visit. While this model eliminates the need for a separate state review of the program, it has the disadvantage of not addressing the issues which are of interest to the state but not to the

accrediting agency.

Some programs, such as those in Nursing, undergo review not only by an accrediting agency but also by a state licensing board. Coordinating reviews with the state licensing board, which may have a less arduous review process than accreditation, can be accomplished with relative ease depending on how cooperative the licensing board is. The SUS conducted a joint review of several nursing programs with the Florida Board of Nursing (BON). The SUS and the BON each required a separate self-study, because the format was sufficiently different to make coordination of the self-studies cumbersome. The site visits were coordinated, but the reports were separate.

Coordinating **both** the self-study and the site visit is the most complete type of synchronized review. This model involves the most effort in coordination, but that effort is offset by the reduced effort on the part of the university and the program in preparing for just one self-study and visit. The SUS initiated and participated in the first tripartite joint review in the United States involving the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the State Department of Education (DOE), and the State University System. The SUS has also negotiated with the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) to conduct a completely synchronized review in 1997.

The main difficulty in conducting joint reviews arises in synchronizing reviews involving programs at several universities.

The SUS, for example, is comprised of nine universities. Programs which are offered at only one or two universities (such as medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy) are relatively easy to coordinate with accreditation reviews. However, as the number of universities offering a particular discipline increases (such as in Education and in Business), synchronization becomes more complex, particularly if the state wants to have a systemwide perspective of all programs within a limited time period. Programs at various universities in a system do not typically undergo accreditation at the same time. Therefore program reviews which are scheduled to coincide with accreditation could string out a program review of a particular discipline over a period of five to seven years.

This is certainly not conducive to obtaining a statewide perspective of the status of a discipline in the system. Compressing synchronized reviews into a one- or two-year time span requires considerable accommodation from the accrediting agency and the universities involved. The SUS has been fortunate to work out such a commitment from AACSB, and it is for this reason that the joint review holds particularly high promise.

Coordination of Self-Studies

The experience of the SUS with seven accrediting agencies in the last two years indicates that the type of information requested in the program review self-study is also requested in the accreditation self-studies in the major areas of curriculum,

student admissions and retention, student services, faculty teaching and research, program budget, library resources, laboratories, space, and support staff. The areas of interest to the state which were usually not included in accreditation self-studies related to accountability and cost-effectiveness, access, student demand, articulation with community colleges, feedback from graduates, degree productivity, new program development, and the success of particular enhancements such as the Florida's Eminent Scholars program. Equal opportunity/affirmative action information which is requested in the state self-studies is beginning to be requested in some accreditation self-studies as well. In terms of specific data forms required in the state program review self-studies, the following table indicates, in each case, the number of accrediting agencies (from a total of seven) which also require similar information in their self-studies.

Program Review Self-Study Forms	**Number of Accreditation Self-Studies Including Similar Information**
Number of majors, including transfers	3 (no information on transfers)
Admission and enrollment	4
Graduate placement	3
Faculty profile	7

Table Continued

Faculty budget	5
Support personnel	4
Required courses	7
Special cost courses	0
Internship information	5
Contracts & Grants	3
Space allocation and needs	6
Equipment budget and needs	3
Results of other program evaluations	0
Library collection	7
Summary faculty vita	2 (full vita)
Student FTE productivity	0
Breakdown of course coverage by regular faculty, adjuncts, and teaching assistants	0 (several included information on numbers of part-time faculty)

The few specific items required in the SUS self-study documents but not in accreditation self-studies relate to matters of interest to the State legislature, such as access, proportion

of courses taught by adjuncts and teaching assistants, and FTE productivity. Other states probably have their own sets of items which are of particular interest to the state but are not part of an accreditation review.

Advantages, Disadvantages, and Lessons Learned

This section will summarize a few of the more important advantages and disadvantages of joint review activity, and offer advice for those interested in pursuing the possibilities of joint review.

1. **Timing is Important.** This is true for two reasons. First, the time involved with preparing for a successful joint review can depend upon the complexity of the model, but, in any case, the more time that is spent in planning increases the likelihood of success. For example, the SUS intends to conduct joint reviews involving single site visits with accrediting bodies in pharmacy and in dentistry at the SUS institutions where degrees are offered, but these amount to only two universities. Therefore, the model, the necessary Memorandum of Understanding, and the addendum to the accrediting body can be created within a year. Planning for a joint review with the AACSB, however, began in 1991 with a target date of 1997. This was necessary because (a) nine institutions will be involved, and (b) the site visits needed to be collapsed into a single year; hence, a year well into the future had to be assumed and then negotiated both with the AACSB and the universities.

Secondly, the calendar of site visits is of consideration if

several universities are involved. As indicated, the joint review to be conducted with AACSB was especially attractive because of the accrediting body's willingness to collapse all activities into one year. The tripartite review of teacher education (NCATE, SUS, and DOE) operates under the NCATE calendar. As a consequence, the program review is virtually ongoing from the SUS standpoint. This makes SUS reporting difficult, and it mandates that the SUS maintain staff to work on the review.

2. **Strength is Important.** There is no point in working toward joint reviews with accrediting bodies who are not viewed as extremely strong by the academic disciplines.

3. **Consider Options.** The LCME pointedly did not wish to engage in joint review activities with the SUS. The SUS, subsequent to this understanding, went directly to its two affected universities, and inquired whether they preferred to undergo one review instead of two. The universities immediately provided assurance that the SUS would receive institutional self-studies, invitation to the presidential exit interviews, and the accrediting body's report.

4. **Different Models for Different Circumstances.** The agreement reached between the two SUS universities and the SUS with respect to LCME accreditation points out that those wishing to work toward multiple reviews should expect variations on models, subject to whether or not a level of comfort is attained that programs will receive sufficient scrutiny. The joint review

in Medicine, for example, resulted in and amounted to little real interaction between the SUS and the accrediting body; even so, the SUS was comfortable with the strength of that accrediting body and the level of scrutiny.

5. Doubling the Manpower. One of the most evident advantages of joint reviews is that it provides for more manpower during the site visit. This is less advantageous in cases where a single SUS consultant participates with an accreditation review team. However, in the case of the tripartite review of teacher education, the manpower on site is doubled due to the presence of three agencies at once. This has increased efficiency as well as confidence that institutions are receiving adequate scrutiny.

6. To Vote or Not to Vote. It is the position of the SUS that it not be afforded opportunities to vote on accreditation standards in those joint review cases where it has employed a consultant who participates in the entire site visit. Such is the case with the tripartite NCATE, SUS, DOE joint review of teacher education: NCATE votes on state program approval standards with members of the DOE team. Likewise, the DOE team members vote on NCATE standards with the NCATE team. The SUS consultant, while an active participant of the process, is not a voting member.

In order to conduct successful joint reviews both the similarities and differences between the particular program review model utilized and the accreditation process must be carefully examined prior to each joint review. Where important

differences exist, the willingness of the accrediting agency to accommodate program review, and the willingness of program review coordinators to compromise, are key in conducting a review that meets the needs of both parties adequately, while resulting in a significant savings in cost, time and effort for the program being evaluated.

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